

Hawaii MARINE ON POINT

HAWAII MARINE D SECTION

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A day in the life of a cook

Culinary specialists work around the clock to give patrons fresh, hot chow

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It's 3 a.m.; all is quiet around MCB Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay — except when the occasional military police department vehicle cruises by. Most residents are still sleeping, but just before it's time to go to work, hundreds head to one of the dining facilities on base for some good, hot chow. What a lot of these people don't seem to realize is that while they're still dreaming in their cozy beds, the cooks who work in the chow halls are up and working.

"We are all here by zero three-thirty in the morning to give us enough time to prepare the food and inspect it for quality," said Sgt. Johann Lehnhoff, assistant chief cook at Anderson Hall Dining Facility, 1st Battalion, 12th Marine Regiment. "We'll work for eleven days, straight, and then get two days off — which can be pretty demanding."

The Bronx, N.Y. native has been a cook for approximately seven-and-a-half years and said he would have not enlisted in the Marine Corps if the recruiter told him that he couldn't get this particular job.

"I wasn't sure what I really wanted to do out of high school, and started with electronics," said the 27-year-old. "Eventually I figured out [that] I wanted to work in food service and have been here ever since."

One would probably think there's not too much to being a cook and working in a chow hall, but assuming that would make one incorrect. According to Lehnhoff, being a military cook is a tiring and sometimes thankless job.

"This job is actually really demanding," said Lehnhoff. "You rarely get any time off, so your co-workers become your family. We're all a team. If I look good, it's because of them."

The Anderson Hall Dining Facility is run on a two-watch system, said Lehnhoff. The first shift works from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., returning to work the next morning at 3:30 a.m. and staying until 8:30 a.m. In the midst of their work schedules, the cooks still have to make time for standing duties, participating in ceremonies, doing physical training, and keeping the rest of their Marine Corps training up-to-date.

Upon arriving to work, the cooks' uniforms are inspected and their overall health is checked, said Lehnhoff.

"Health is a big concern here at the chow hall," said Lehnhoff. "We can't have anyone in the chow hall with any health issues — at all — that may affect how they perform or that may affect others."

After they are inspected, the cooks are then briefed on what needs to be accomplished during that shift and what foods will be made for that day. The Armed

Forces Recipe Cards, which are used by cooks throughout the Marine Corps, must be followed. The cards explain exactly what the meals of the day are and how to cook them.

In order for the food to be critiqued, serving lines must be set up at least 30 minutes prior to each meal. During the critique, each food item is inspected for quality, to ensure that it is served at its best.

One of the hardest things to have to deal with, as a cook, Lehnhoff admitted, is not being able to get the best quality food item. He said that as someone who takes pride in the food he serves, it is bothersome to think that the troops mistake poor cooking techniques with poor quality food items.

"We work with what we have," said Lehnhoff, "and we do the best that we can."

Lehnhoff also said that one of their biggest enemies is time. It's always a fight, because no matter what may go wrong, the doors have to open at a certain time to feed the customers. However, having a night cook helps lessen the time problem.

"We have a night cook who tries to help out as much as he can while on duty," said the Samuel Gompers High School graduate. "He'll either cut ribs or do something to help get the next day's chow prepared."

Although very stressful at times, Lehnhoff said that the gratitude shown by the customers makes the difficulties worthwhile.

"When the Marines come through, and they like the chow, it really raises the morale of the cooks here," he explained. "It really means a lot to us. A simple 'thank you' is the best there is."

Lance Cpl. Tavonne Douglas, food service specialist, Headquarters Battalion, who has been working at Anderson Hall for one year now, admitted that he'd always known he wanted to be a cook.

"I love cooking, and I dream of owning my own restaurant one day," said Douglas. "I knew I wanted to do this coming into the Marine Corps, even just for the experience."

Douglas admitted that it is very difficult at times to balance his job, his personal life, and his duties as a Marine.

"I'm trying to go to college and start an internet business, but it seems time is not allowing me to," said the Harlem, N.Y. native. "Plus, then you have your normal training like the rifle range, gas chamber and PFTs — but you're pulling twelve-hour days. It's a real challenge. ..."

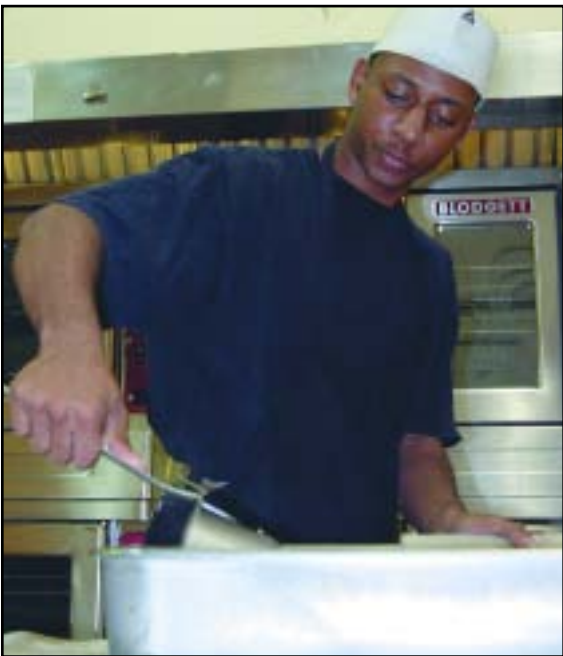
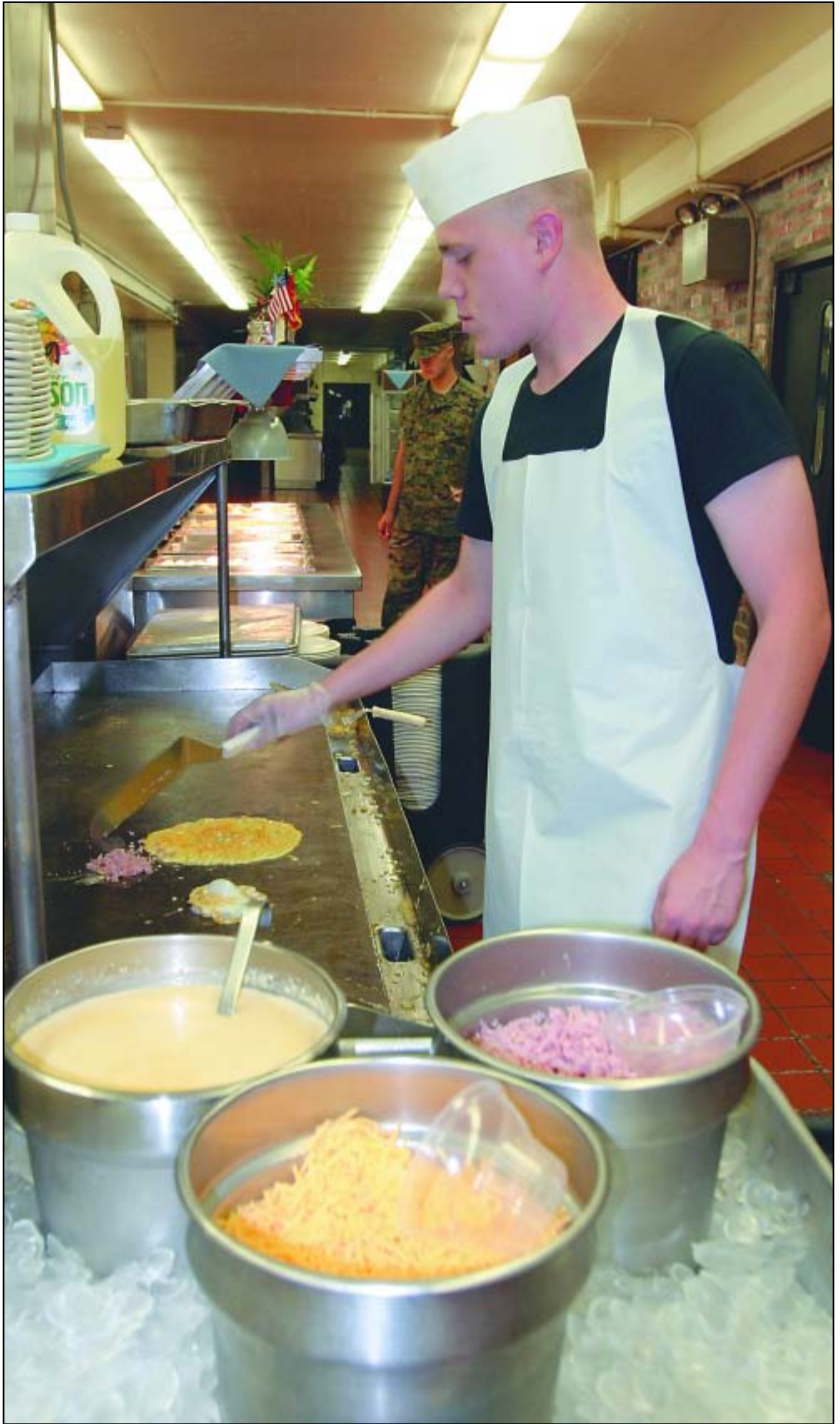
The 19-year-old, agreed with Lehnhoff and said it's the little things that make it worthwhile.

"One night ROTC came in, really late. ... There were around 200 kids and ... there was only me and two other Marines. We all stayed and whipped them up a meal. Just seeing them all well fed and happy was the biggest reward."



Above — Freshly made pancakes, prepared by Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Keturia Laidlaw, VP-47, receive a sprinkling of powdered sugar before being placed on the serving line.

Below — Culinary Specialist Seaman Apprentice Nick Konopka, VP-47, prepares omelettes for breakfast at the Anderson Hall Dining Facility.



Above — Lance Cpl. Tavonne Douglas, food service specialist, Headquarters Battalion, prepares rice.

Right — Lance Cpl. Tavonne Douglas (right), Lance Cpl. Delwayne Center, and Culinary Specialist 3rd Class Keturia Laidlaw, all cooks at Anderson Hall, have the food they prepared inspected by Cpl. Brian Bones.

